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ABSTRACT

After initially dispelling predictable fears that his paper might suggest that computers can be equated with man, the author states the problem: what part, if any, might computers play in counseling. Specifically, the possibilities for therapeutic synthetic (artificial) counseling encounters are discussed. Two propositions are significant: (1) the human nervous system can not tell the difference between an actual experience and one imagined vividly and in detail; and (2) it is impossible not to communicate. Behavior in interactional situations, even synthetic ones, communicates. Three patterns of behavior (from Karen Horney) are selected as parameters: (1) moving toward people; (2) moving against people; and (3) moving away from people. These provide three global and highly generalized nails on which to hang thoughts on the topic. Propositions considered are: (1) communicative relationships between human beings and extra-human entities continually exist; (2) such synthetic relationships can be therapeutic in effect; and (3) there are dimensions of the personality which may make such relationships possible with a computer. The paper, having only broached the possibility of therapeutic synthetic relationships and having only briefly suggested their application using the selected behavioral parameters, concludes that here indeed is a fertile area for imaginative research. (TL)

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SYNTHETIC CONFRONTATION THERAPY

A Paper By

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Part of A Symposium Entitled
"A MAN-MACHINE SYSTEM FOR
CONTEMPORARY COUNSELING PRACTICE"
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SYMPOSIUM PROPOSAL

T G I S S

A MAN-MACHINE SYSTEM FOR CONTEMPORARY COUNSELING PRACTICE

General Abstract

Objectives include (1) a round-table confrontation between counselor educators and professional researchers on critical issues related to a prototype computer support system for pupil personnel services in the public schools of Bartlesville, Oklahoma, (2) the dissemination of working papers of a U.S.O. E. supported project in advanced educational systems design, and (3) the exchange of new innovations related to the development of such systems.

Symposium will provide listeners with a description of a "Total Guidance Information Support System" (TGISS) which constitutes one approach to the utilization of advanced systems in comtemporary counseling practice. The system is designed to provide computer support in the areas of (1) information storage and retrieval, (2) gaming for vocational awareness, (3) diagnosis and prediction, and (4) synthetic confrontation therapy in a conversational dialog mode.

Issues to be included are the kind of support needed, types of applications, implications for national implementation, systems most beneficial, realistic, and financially expedient, and the de-humanization of the counseling process.

SYNTHETIC CONFRONTATION THERAPY

I. Introduction

Robert S. Woodworth is attributed with the perceptive observation that "psychology first lost its soul, then its mind, then consciousness; but strangely enough it still behaves."[1] It is possible that the title "Synthetic Confrontation Therapy" might elicit an equally salient post script; or possibly stimulate a small maneuver by those who periodically retreat, regroup, and draw another line past which the computer dare not go.

In this presentation, however, it is not suggested that a machine is a man, or that man is a machine; but rather that man "has" and "uses" a machine. The computer is perceived primarily as an extension of the human brain, in much the same catagory as would be a high-speed abacus or slide rule. From this perspective there appears to be little necessity for attempting to reduce thought to the movement of electrons or consciousness to mere chemical action. Computers may then be regarded as "machines we think with."

II. The Problem

It is questionable that one may justifiably view the combination of computer science and counseling psychology as "just another application of the computer." It is proposed, in fact, that from this particular union, there may evolve some implications of sufficient uniqueness to justify

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[1]Robert Baker, ed., Psychology in the Wry (Princeton, N.J.: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1963), p. 1.

the attention of imaginative researchers.

Of basic significance is the operant necessity, by definition, for the existence of a relationship (or a derived counterpart to a relationship), between a human being and an extra-human entity.

With regard to significant behavioral parameters of three basic personality types, consideration of the following questions appears to be in order: Are there personality types with capability for relating to a computer? Can a man-machine system function as a therapeutic agent in two-way interaction? Can a synthetic counseling encounter with an extra-human entity enhance therapeutic synthesis of trichodimetrical dimensions of the personality?

III. The Terms

According to Chaplain's Dictionary of Psychological Terms, the word "synthetic" means "artificial, as opposed to natural."[2] This concise definition seems adequate for the purposes of this presentation.

In his famous book, Psycho-Cybernetics, Maltz alludes to science's recent discovery of "synthetic experience." He describes a process whereby, for all practical purposes, "experience" is synthesized; it is literally produced and controlled in the "laboratory of the mind." Of significance is his proposition that the human nervous system cannot tell the difference between an "actual" experience and an experience "imagined vividly and

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[2]J.P. Chaplin, Dictionary of Psychology (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1968), p.493.

in detail."

Cases are examined in which this type of "synthetic experience" has been used in very practical ways to improve skill in dart-throwing, shooting basketball goals, public speaking, social poise, selling, and others. Included also are (1) a case which involves overcoming fear of the dentist, and (2) a case in which two prominent doctors are synthetically therapeutic to neurotics.

The term "confrontation" is used, not in the sense of challenge or opposition, but in its implication of a face-to-face encounter.

There probably should be a statement at this point regarding the impossibility of not communicating. Since there is no such thing as non-behavior, one cannot not behave. If we accept the proposition that all behavior in an interactional situation has message value, (i.e. is communication), it follows that activity or inactivity, words or silence, all communicate something to receivers. These receivers, in turn, are also incapable of not communicating; thus, communicative relationship is established.

The man at a crowded lunch counter who looks straight ahead, or the airplane passenger who sits with his eyes closed, are both communicating that they do not want to speak to anybody or be spoken to, and their neighbors usually "get the message" and respond appropriately by leaving them alone. This, obviously, is just as much an interchange of communication as an animated discussion.

Neither can it be said that "communication" takes place only when it is intentional, conscious, or successful; that is, when mutual understanding occurs. Whether message sent equals message received is an important but different order of analysis, as it must rest ultimately on evaluations of introspective, subject-reported data. The significance at this point, however, is in the development of communicative relationship, aside from, and/or in spite of the motivations or intentions of the communicants.

The word "therapy" is used in its traditional sense, expressed by Harriman as "any procedure (or situation) which serves to ease, to palliate, or to cure a disorder or personality maladjustment."[3]

Emphasis is placed on therapeutic procedure rather than on the phenomenal condition of the psyche, due primarily to the difficulties of treating a subject which is self-reflexive. When the mind studies itself, for example, any assumptions have an inevitable tendency toward self-validation.

Since we cannot observe the "mind" at work, therefore, a reasonable approach seems to be the "Black Box Concept."[4]

This concept originally referred to captured enemy electronic equipment that could not be opened for observation due to the probability of explosive charges inside. The concept now is generally applied to entities or situations so complex that it becomes reasonable to disregard the internal

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[3]Philip Harriman, Handbook of Psychological Terms (Paterson, N.J.: Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1959), p.191.

[4]Paul Watzlawick, Janet Beavin, Don Jackson, Pragmatics of Human Communication (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1967). p.43.

structure and attend to specific input-output relations, and evidences of therapeutic effect.

In this approach, the actual inner working of the box is not essential for the study of the function of the device in the greater system of which it is a part.

IV. The Parameters

The constants or elements selected to form the trichotomy of personality variables under consideration are extensions of Karen Horney's character analysis.

During the 1940's, Horney became convinced that her ten listed patterns of behavior were reducible to three groupings, each following from one of the primary elements which she had proposed as comprising the basic patterns of emotional distress (basic anxiety).

A. Moving toward people. Horney proposed that this pattern evolved from a recognition and acceptance of individual inadequacy. If such behavior, for example, by a child, successfully elicited love and response from the parents, it gained probability in becoming an established pattern. The process would then be as follows: Overt love (to) satisfying feelings (to) feelings of belonging and support (to) reduction in fear (to) less feelings of weakness and isolation.[5]

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[5]Donald Ford and Hugh Urban, Systems of Psychotherapy: A Comparative Study (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1963), p.497.

B. Moving against people. Some persons respond to the aspect of hostility by developing a behavior pattern that is antagonistic to the people who surround them. Behavior becomes generally characterized by acts of rebellion, defiant and destructive behavior, and other aggressive responses. Horney sees this pattern as involving the recognition of anger affect in one's self, the perceptual identification of anger in others, and the implicit decision to fight. Multiple modes are found for venting hostile responses, and interpersonal patterns may develop if the person is successful in "beating" his opposition, fending off frightening persons, or otherwise experiencing the satisfaction which accompanies reduced fear. In Horney's language, "he does it partly for his own protection, partly for revenge, and partly for the feeling of strength that he derives."[6]

C. Moving away from people. The isolative aspect of the basic distress responses can lead to patterns of avoidance and withdrawal from people. Although Horney did not seem to emphasize the consequences of this pattern, it would reasonably imply an approach to something else, such as objects and dreams, in search of fear reduction and some positive emotionality.[7]

Two additional points regarding Horney's "new theory of neurosis" are probably in order:

A. One is that the content of the above responses is consistent with normal developmental processes. Every person, for example, will at times

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[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.,p.498.

give into others, fight them, or keep to one's self. Severe conflict would result, then, when response patterns become inflexible; or, of course, when circumstances intensely elicit all three of these mutually incompatible responses simultaneously, thus calling upon the individual to be compliant, aggressive, and avoidant, all at once.

B. The other point is, that Horney's patterns are significant to this presentation, not in their implications for mental disorder, but in that they provide three global and highly generalized "nails on which to hang our thoughts."

V. The Propositions

1. It is proposed that communicative relationships between human beings and extra-human entities not only can, but continually do, exist.

The documentary appeal at this point shall not be to authority, not to controlled experimental evidence; but rather to applications of conditions so common in our personal experience, as to be, generally acceptable without question.

Probably few people, for example, would feel a need to question whether communication occurs when a traffic light changes, or when a man glances at the speedometer of his moving automobile. In fact, in certain circumstances, the changing to red of the traffic light may even elicit from the driver a verbal response of certain four-letter anglo-saxon words.

Let's attend for a moment to the World War II G.I. Code of Conduct, namely: "If it's lying there,--pick it up. If it moves,--salute it. If it doesn't move,--paint it." In effect, every piece of litter begins to scream, "I am lying here, pick me up!" Every bar and stripe which comes into peripheral vision barks, "Salute me, salute me!" Buildings, vehicles, posts, and trees seem to join together on every up-beat with paint! paint! paint! It is probable that some of us might also recall some verbalization of a sort, directed toward some of these inantimate objects.

Additionally, in the memory banks of most of us are filed some feelings which once we liberally invested in a "first-love." Some such feelings may have found transference to a relic, a momento, or a ring; some of which feeling residue might even now be called up from the mental mothballs of the cobwebbed corners we reserve for things we distinctly remember forgetting,--by the sight of carved initials on a tree, or a lock of hair in an envelope, or a faded flower pressed between the pages of a book.

Maybe a man forgets the adolescent thrill of feeling one-ness with his speeding automobile. Maybe a woman has forgotten the little "dolly that wanted its mommy." The man with some artificial organs, however, may have a little more difficulty denying the human capability for relating to an object.

At the risk of sounding a little morbid, I would like, additionally, to raise the question as to whether the object of relationship and

vested feeling at a funeral is, at that point, non-living and inantimate, from an organismic point of view.

Possibly the most convincing observation, however, regarding man's capability for relating to a non-human entity, is his all-too-obvious tendency to treat other human beings as objects rather than as individuals of worth and human dignity.

2. It is proposed that such a "synthetic relationship" can be therapeutic in affect.

Dr. Maltz has written of numerous cases where plastic surgery has resulted in sudden and dramatic changes in personality. There were some patients, however, who showed no change in personality after surgery, (i.e. continued to behave just as if he still had "an ugly face"). Maltz later concluded that the physical image itself is not the real key to changes in personality. It is as if personality has a face. The real key lies, then, in the person perceiving. He reacts to his own reality, as it filters through his own phenomenalogical frame of reference.[8] In example, he would run just as fast if he thought a bear were after him, as he would if there really were.

Given a particular personality type, viewing the computer in a certain way, which will be developed in the section which follows, it is probably not unreasonable to suggest that a synthetic relationship might

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[8]Maxwell Maltz, Psycho-Cybernetics: A New Technique for Using Your Subconscious Power (Hollywood: Wilshire Book Co., 1960), p. IX.

be therapeutic.

Most consistent consumers of the daily comics are familiar with Linus and his security blanket. Most of us, however, are possibly not as conscious of our own counterparts to the security blanket, however therapeutic they may be to us.

3. It is proposed that there are dimensions of personality the presence or absence of which may be significant to one's probability and/or capability for relating with a computer.

In a collection of data from a 14 county Central Texas area in 1966-67, it was found that a large percentage of teachers did not utilize audio-visual equipment, when available. Their commonly stated reasons included, first of all, an expression of fear and distrust for technical equipment; and secondly, a fear of technical malfunction, supported with stories of embarrassing situations resulting from broken films, blown fuses, or other technical failures. These teachers, obviously, will not find it a simple matter to relate with a computer, at least not without orientation of a sort. Their experiences apparently have conditioned a tendency to move away from objects.

There are two other response types mentioned earlier, however, both of which seem to represent potential candidates of relating capability. Persons who basically move away from or against others might actually feel more comfortable in the presence of a consistant, objective, mechanical interacter, which is neuter, and which is free of the numerous

non-verbal cues described by Hall in his book The Silent Language. At least, the computer does not look like the student's step-father, or frown when it has a headache.

VI. The Conclusion

In conclusion, let us consider the well-known poem entitled "Soaring," in which the pilot bursts forth with an impressive description of the almost aesthetic experience which he and his airplane are sharing.

He joyously speaks of "flinging his craft through endless halls of space--"Up, up, we go," he says, "where never lark or even eagle flew--"

He continues, "We rolled, and turned, and did a hundred things you never dreamed of." He begins freely to use the word "we" in referring to the accomplishments of him and his craft together.

His concluding statement reaches a climactic tone, as together, "sunward they climb, reach out,---and touch the face of God!"

There seems to be relationship there; synthetic, yes, but apparently of positive emotional value to the pilot. If man can avoid becoming the tool of his tools,---if he can view the computer as an extension of himself; then maybe together, we can "roll, and turn, and do a hundred things we never dreamed of"---maybe we can reach a little closer toward each other---and toward the "face of God!"

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